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TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF IMAGINATION

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I

In a recent prose piece, Samuel Beckett writes as follows:

> No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, *imagination dead imagine.*[1]

In this puzzling but profound utterance, especially in its concluding three words, Beckett is pointing to the paradox of a mental activity which, conceived as a fixed faculty, is dead or dying but which, considered dynamically and in process, is very much alive. *The* imagination may indeed be dead, yet we keep on imagining — much as Beckett himself continues to write prose, while scorning the established forms of this literary medium. Indeed, imagining is so essential to human mental activity that its elimination would radically alter the character of man's mind. Disagreement may well arise as to how imagining should be described or explained, but it is difficult to deny its central place in much mentation. I say "central" and not, as one might have expected, "marginal." In dealing with imagination, we have to do, not with a peripheral phenomenon taking place in the wings of awareness, but with something that occurs on the center stage of consciousness. To imagine is not — or at least is not always — to indulge in an evasive manoeuvre carrying us away from the mind's principal preoccupations. It is not — or at least is not necessarily — to sidestep the real in order to enter or erect a separate mental domain which is unreal or surreal. The life of imagination is at one with the life of mind as a whole.

That imagining is crucial to a considerable portion of mental activity can be inferred not only from the frequent recourse which we make to concrete images and diagrams — to the devices of what Plato called *dianoia* — but also from the polymorphic use which human beings make of hypotheses and thought-experiments in everyday reasoning and in scientific theorizing. What John Dewey termed "dramatic rehearsal in imagination" occurs constantly when we dream, daydream, think, and even when we perceive. Indeed, it is rare to accomplish any of these quotidian activities without in some way making use of inherent imaginative powers. Perhaps only in the case of perceiving do we have the impression of participating, and then only on occasion, in a perfectly straightforward activity of Moorean simplicity. But it can also be argued that no act of perceiving is wholly unattenuated by nonperceptual elements, among which imaginative activity must be included. This can be seen, for example, in Wittgenstein's analysis of "seeing as." Referring to a scalene triangle whose bottom line is its longest side, he comments that "it takes *imagination* to see the triangle as fallen."[2] Not even this brief demonstration is needed to persuade us that imagining is ingredient in such diverse acts as daydreaming, dreaming, hallucinating, remembering, and anticipating. Although occurring differently in each case — so differently, in fact, that a separate investigation would be required just to establish these differences — imagining is genuinely immanent in these activities and is not an *ad hoc* addition to them.

The centrality of imagining extends to the social and political realm as well. To cite just one familiar example: when the slogan "l'imagination au pouvoir" appeared spontaneously during the May, 1968 uprisings in Paris, this was not a merely whimsical event. It was, at least in part, the expression of a profound distrust of the prevalent reality-oriented, rationalist-technocratic model of human action. The slogan called for a new emphasis on the *possible* in human affairs. It reflected and encapsulated the type of quasi-utopian political speculation that is found, among other places, in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. Marcuse explicitly appeals to imagination as a means of

1. Samuel Beckett, *Imagination Dead Imagine* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1965), p. 7. My italics.
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), p. 207.

realizing a freer, more playful sense of action and interaction. What is disappointing in Marcuse's program — as well as in the barricade mentality that failed, following the Paris rebellion, to think through the rhetoric of slogans — is that no convincing notion of imagination itself, supposedly the very organ of liberation, is offered. As a model for the act, Marcuse takes over the hierarchical, faculty-dominated theory of Schiller, who in turn owes much to Kant. The result is a warmed-over, twice-removed Kantian version of the phenomenon. Needed here as elsewhere in contemporary appeals to imagination is a coherent and non-derivative account of precisely *what imagining is* — how it functions, what its primary traits are, how it relates to other mental acts.

It is a remarkable fact that such an account is lacking not only on the contemporary scene, but, even more significantly, in the majority of Western theories of mind. The reason I call this conspicuous absence of an adequate account "remarkable" is that imagination stands out among human mental acts precisely in terms of its easy accessibility and its virtually assured success. On the one hand, perhaps no other mental act is so readily available to consciousness as is imagining. Undistracted and undisturbed by mundane concerns, the imaginer is fully present to what he imagines, and what he imagines in turn reveals itself to him totally and transparently. On the other hand, he can imagine just what he wants to imagine. No sooner does he desire to imagine something in particular than this something appears to him directly and without delay. What human experience could be less problematic? Or so it seems.

Or so it *seems:* for practically all extant descriptions and theories of imagination are beset with confusion and contradiction. The obfuscation takes two closely related forms. First, imagining is not decisively distinguished from other mental acts. Secondly, the intrinsic character of imagining is itself misdescribed or misunderstood. The combined result of these two forms of obfuscation is a denial, or at least a demotion, of the importance of imagination vis-à-vis the rest of mental activity. In particular, any autonomy which one might be tempted to ascribe to imagining on the basis of its ready availability and its self-incurring success is undermined by a tendency to consider it as second-rate in status.

This tendency to disparage imagination is as prevalent in common-sensical attitudes as it is in psychological or philosophical theories. When we say unthinkingly that "it was merely my imagination" or that "my imagination was playing tricks on me," we express, in the telling terms of ordinary language, the same dismissive frame of mind to which the mainstream of Western psychology and philosophy has given sophisticated elaborations and justifications. Within psychology, we find that associationism and, more recently, behaviourism consider the image to be a mere replica, trace, or combination of hypothetically simple, first-order sensations. Even the psychoanalysis of Freud, for all of its brilliant insight into phantasy, tends to equate imagining with daydreaming, and to regard the latter as the mere result of a temporary remission of ego-control. Jung's analytical psychology underlines the therapeutic efficacy of what is called "active imagination," but never attempts to elucidate imagining itself in any detail. Moreover, the role of active imagination is of interest not for its own sake but primarily as a vehicle for the unearthing of archetypal material. In Piagetian psychology, imagining in the child is conceived as a form of "internalized imitation" which is displayed in symbolic play and is itself only a transitional stage in the development of full cognitive powers that will, ultimately, be free from reliance upon images. When Piaget ranges imagining under

3. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), Chapters 7—9.

4. On the associationist view of imagination, see Taine, *De L'Intelligence* (Paris, 1871), I, pp. 9 ff. For Freud's view, see *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), I, 295 ff.; V, 509-561; and IX, 144 f. Jung's most pertinent description of active imagination occurs in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 526 ff. For Piaget's view, see *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood*, trans. C. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson (New York: Norton, 1962), chapters 2—4. *Cf.* also Hans G. Furth, *Piaget and Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 68-106.

the general rubric of "egocentric representative activity," he might well be summing up a whole tradition of psychological theorizing on the topic.[4] In this tradition, imagining is viewed as a rear-guard picturing activity carried out internally to, and under the aegis of, the representing subject or ego. It is no wonder, then, that imagination has been assigned a distinctly minor role in many psychological portrayals of mind.

Imagination has fared little better in the hands of philosophers — in fact, in one basic respect it has fared worse. For philosophers have tended to confuse imagining not just with apparent allies such as daydreaming or symbolic play but also with such disparate acts as perceiving or thinking. This more radical confusion may be due to philosophers' being more theory-minded than their psychologist *confrères* and thus to their being even less attentive to descriptive detail. As a consequence, their accounts are typically *truncated from below*, lacking the firm foundation in exact description which should precede, or at least confirm, theory-building. Perhaps it has been assumed — wrongly — that such a foundation is not needed in view of the very accessibility and transparency of imagining. But on the contrary: imagination is a highly elusive phenomenon.

In any event, the sins of philosophical theorists in regard to accurate description have been especially grievous. They extend from the distant past into the most recent present, leaving us with a bewildering array of alternative conceptions. These conceptions range from Plato's and Hume's strict subordination of imagining to perceiving (for both philosophers, imagination is a weakened form of perception) through Aristotle's and Kant's attempts to make imagination an intermediary between sensation and thought ("the soul never thinks without an image," said Aristotle, and Kant echoes this by calling the image a "mediating representation") and down to the effort, on the part of the German and English Romantics and the French surrealists, to promote imagination into an extravagantly superordinate position.[5] The congenial but fatal error of Romantics and surrealists alike lay in overreacting to previous accounts and particularly in mistaking the importance of imagination in art for its supremacy in epistemology and metaphysics. The most effective way in which to overcome former failures is not merely to reverse priorities. To claim that imagination is superior to all other mental acts is just as dogmatically unfounded as Plato's or Hume's efforts to impose on imagination a decidedly inferior role. In both instances, and in the case of the mediation theorists as well, a rigidly hierarchical view of mind is presupposed, and it is presumed that imagination must be given some standing, however precarious, within this hierarchy. But the enormous gamut of possible positions contained in such a stratified model — once one begins to differentiate levels of mind, there is no way to place an effective limit on the procedure— prevents us from concluding anything definite with regard to imagination's position in comparison with that of other mental acts. Not only is it not convincingly distinguished from sibling acts such as phantasy or memory — a weakness of psychological theories as well — but it is not securely situated in relation to such manifestly different acts as sensation or intellection, being affiliated with these latter in a variety of conflicting ways. The picture which thus emerges from a conspectus of former philosophical theories is one of disarray.

What also emerges from such an overview is a warning that if the mind is considered to be a mere processor of sensations or as a series of successively higher functions, imagination will be denied a distinctive role of its own. In such *a priori* models of mental activity, imagining will almost always be consigned to a secondary or even tertiary status in which it merely modifies what is proffered to it by some supposedly superior cognitive power such as thought or by some putatively more original source such as sensation. In this way, the specificity of imagination as a unique mental act is overlooked. What is called for is an approach that respects essential, and not merely casual or contingent, differences between types of mental acts, accounting for each act in its own terms. In short, it is a matter of being open to what we may call *the multiplicity of the*

5. The quotation from Aristotle is to be found at *De Anima* 432 a 14; and the phrase quoted from Kant is located at *Critique of Pure Reason* B 177 A 138.

mental. Only an acute sensitivity to the uniqueness of each kind of mental act will permit imagination to be viewed as a phenomenon in its own right. As Wittgenstein remarks:

> "But what is this queer experience?" Of course it is not queerer than any other; it simply differs in kind from those experiences which we regard as the most fundamental ones, our sense impressions for instance.[6]

If imagination truly differs in kind from other mental acts, then it merits a separate account that would allow its specific structure to be set free from the morass of misconception in which it has been so deeply mired in past theories of mind.

Now, it cannot be denied that imagination has been regarded by philosophers in the twentieth century in a manner significantly different from the way in which it was seen in the past. Formerly, one of the main motives for denigrating the role of imagination in human experience was that it represented a threat to reason; it stood for what was irrational or at least beyond rational control. Imagination was viewed, in Samuel Johnson's words, as a "licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptable of limitations, and impatient of restraint."[7] One of the primary tasks of philosophy, especially in movements such as Stoicism and eighteenth century rationalism, was to help the individual defend against the incursions of imagination: incursions that upset the delicate balance between knowledge and passion. As a result, although imagination was continually taken to task for its vagaries, it was at least a matter of concern for many earlier philosophers, who waxed eloquent in denouncing (while often secretly admiring) its charms. Twentieth century philosophers, in contrast, do not regard imagination as threatening in the first place, since rational self-enlightenment and self-control are no longer predominant philosophical ideals. Yet for the most part these philosophers continue to play down the significance of imagining. This stems not from fear of imagination's beguiling and bewitching powers but from a conviction that imagination has become *obsolete* as a subject of serious philosophical reflection. Whatever its admitted use and relevance in everyday life, interest in it has dwindled considerably in professional philosophy, where it is either ignored altogether or treated with thinly veiled disdain. This near-eclipse of imagination as a topic of live discussion in philosophy derives partly from a criticism and rejection of certain epistemological notions (e.g. such as represenation) which have formed the basis for many traditional conceptions of what imagining involves. But it also comes from an attempt to stress the primordiality of certain key concepts such as formal structure, ordinary language, or Being—which are thought to have been themselves unjustly neglected in the course of Western philosophy and which, by their very nature, leave little room for imagination as a singular and significant human activity.

Exceptions to this twentieth century trend of regarding imagination as obsolete are few in number: Croce, Collingwood, Bachelard, Ryle, and Sartre. The first three regard the use of imagination in artistic creation and enjoyment as paradigmatic. Like Breton or Schelling in this respect, they strive to exalt imagining on the basis of a much too delimited role. Moreover, this very role has been questioned by a number of movements within modern art such as cubism, op art, and minimalism. In any case, recourse to aesthetic experience is not sufficient to shore up the seminal significance of imagination in its *non*-artistic avatars. Ryle, on the other hand, introduces a broader perspective by conceiving imagining as a form of pretending or make-believe. But this conception of imagining overlooks the decisive objections of Collingwood, Ryle's immediate predecessor in the Waynflete Chair of Metaphysical Philosophy. For imagining is not merely pretending that something is the case — this is to take the part for the whole. Nor is it, as Ryle claims, "one among many ways of utilizing 'knowledge" (i.e., through its use of hypothetical thinking).[8] This is to turn imagination into a mere

6. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 215.
7. Samuel Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 125 (1751).
8. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965), p. 272. For Collingwood's critique of an interpretation of imagination as make-believe, see *Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), chapters 2—5 and especially the statement on p. 224: "The conceptions of past, future, the possible, the hypothetical, are as meaningless for imagination as they are for feeling."

mode of knowing or thinking and thus to trivialize it as much as if it were considered a mode of perception.

Sartre shares something with all four of the figures just mentioned. He often seems to have art in mind as a model for what he terms "the imaginary," especially insofar as the imaginary is identified with the unreal. And he ends by assimilating imagining to thinking: "the image is like an incarnation of non-reflective thought. Imaginative consciousness represents a certain type of thought: a thought which is constituted in and through its objects."[9] The consequence of this reductive move is that no provision is made for a specific activity which can be said to be unique to imagination alone. Its nihilating character, by means of which it surpasses the real and constructs the imaginary, is found in greater or lesser degree in all other acts of consciousness. Thinking itself, with whose lower reaches imagining is held to be continuous, is a separate mental act altogether. The paradox is that Sartre, a devastating critic of traditional views of imagination, ends by committing both of the cardinal errors endemic in these same views. He confuses imagining with another kind of mental act, and he downgrades its importance vis-à-vis other mental acts. For imagining is understood not just as non-reflective thinking, but "debased knowing" — knowing that is markedly inferior to pure knowing.[10] Hence if Sartre does represent a brilliant exception to the twentieth century tendency to consider imagination as effete and obsolete, he nevertheless fails to avoid the pitfalls of the classical, logocentric conceptions of imagining which he had sought to undermine in *Imagination*. As portrayed in *L'Imaginaire*, imagination is just as ineptly distinguished from other acts and just as minor in its epistemological significance as it had been in the earlier proposals of Plato and Hume, Aristotle and Kant. The question thus becomes: is there some way of gaining a fresh view that does not end in such a stalemate, a view which neither overrates imagination nor supposes that it is moribund?

II

It is my contention that a renewed attempt at an adequate phenomenology of imagination offers one such way. This is so for at least two reasons. First, among available methods of philosophical analysis perhaps only phenomenology is able to do full justice to a mental act as difficult to pinpoint as imagining. Despite its seemingly Byzantine complexity, phenomenology possesses the one sure virtue of affording a means for the patient probing of a phenomenon. Its very methodological apparatus — above all, its much maligned and frequently misunderstood technique of reduction — induces the caution which is called for in investigating imagination. Secondly, included in this same apparatus is a procedure which itself makes an overt use of imagining: free variation in imagination. Husserl made this, along with reduction (which itself resembles imagination to the extent that both suspend the positing of existence), the cornerstone of phenomenological method. Free variation is the primary means for grasping essences. As Husserl affirmed, "freedom in the investigation of essences necessarily requires that one operate on the plane of imagination."[11] What matters here is not whether Husserl is finally correct in this assertion. Rather, the crucial thing for our purposes is that phenomenology finds itself to be in a particularly advantageous position for describing imagination, since it is already intimately acquainted with this very act in one of its own ongoing procedures. No other philosophical method, with the possible exception of Descartes' method in the *Meditations*, makes so explicit or so extensive a use of imagining. And this is the case in spite of Husserl's abiding logocentrism, which prevented him from according to imagination a central place in his official philosophy of mind — where it is held to be the mere modification of memory.[12] Thus, even if we may agree with Wittgenstein when he says that "there is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies,"[13] a phenomenological approach holds out particular promise with regard to the task of describing the experience of

9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), p. 146.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 82: "un savoir dégradé." Sartre makes no essential distinction between knowing (*savoir*) and thinking (*penser*).
11. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen I* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1950), sec. 70.
12. *Ibid.*, sec. 111—112.
13. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 133.

conscious imagining. Let us now proceed to this task, whose pursuit will occupy the remainder of the present paper.

For the sake of ordering the description of something which may at times appear to lack any intelligible order, the following account will be sub-divided into two sections. In the first, I shall take up imagination in its intentional character. In the second, certain essential traits of conscious imagining as a whole will be considered.

A. Intentional Structure. By the term "intentional structure" I mean that structure of imagination which emerges when it is regarded as analyzable into an *act* of imagining and an *object* (or content) imagined. That imagination can be analyzed in this fashion cannot be fully argued for here. I shall just assert that if all conscious mental acts are intentional in character — such was Brentano's original claim — then, *a fortiori*, conscious imagining must be intentional. Perhaps only Ryle among moderns seriously disputes the correlation of intentional objects with acts of imagining, asserting flatly that "there are no such objects."[14] This denial proceeds from the espousal of a constrictive ontology that refuses to accord an intrinsic ontic status to imagined entities. From a strictly descriptive standpoint, however, it is clear that imagined objects and states of affairs do present themselves to consciousness in experiences of imagining. The smile which, in Ryle's own example, a child imagines to be on a doll's face may not be objectively locatable on this face — admittedly it lacks the ontic status of the empirically real—but it is nonetheless experienced by the child as *present* there. This experience is sufficient to establish, if not the smile's existence, then at least its "intentional inexistence" (in the Scholastic term which Brentano took over for his own purposes). And this latter is all that is required to provide imaginative experience with an intentional structure: a structure which has a descriptive, if not an ontological, basis. In accordance with this structure, imagining as intentional possesses two primary phases: an act-phase and an object-phase.

(a) *act-phase*. The act of conscious imagining can take place in at least three forms, each of which merits separate mention: imaging, imagining-that, and imagining-how.

(i) *imaging*. Most acts of imagining occur as imaging, that is, as the projection and contemplation of imagined objects or events in a specifically sensory guide. By "specifically sensory" I mean as characterized by predicates that specify whether the imagined object is visualized, audialized, smelled in the mind's nose (in Ryle's expression), or felt in the mind's muscles. No act of imaging occurs in a sensory-neutral way. Every such act must be projective in a quasi visual, auditory, olfactory, kinaesthetic, or tactile way — or in some combination of these sensory modalities. But while it is normal in perceiving to combine several modalities in a single experiential interfusion, in imaging we more typically entertain objects or events in just one privileged mode — and most frequently in visual terms. Yet by the same token we can, at will, supplement a given imaged sensory dimension with other dimensions to form a fuller imaginative experience — by, say, imaging not only how a certain object looks but also how it might feel to the touch. No comparable "building up" of successive sensory dimensions is found in perception — which is, as Merleau-Ponty has so splendidly shown, a synaesthetic, syncretistic experience from the very beginning.[15]

(ii) *imagining-that*. But in imagining we are not restricted to imaging disparate and unrelated objects or events. We can also entertain whole complexes of simultaneously apprehended entities — what we shall call "states of affairs". When we

14. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, p. 251. See also p. 248 and p. 254.
15. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), esp. Part Two. If there *is* any sense of building up in perception, it occurs precisely through imaging to ourselves how new or different aspects of the perceived object would appear if they were to be perceived, as when we anticipate an unseen side of a solid object standing before us. The difference remains, however, that what we imaginatively anticipate in the context of perception can be disconfirmed in the light of subsequent experience — while no such disconfirmation is possible in acts of pure imaging. For what we image *is* — insofar as this "is" has any existential force at all — as we imagine it to be and not some other way. It makes no sense to say of imaging that occurs in the context of imaginative experience proper that I can image something as appearing in one way, but that it may turn out to be or to appear differently from how I have thus imaged it.

do so, we are imagining-*that* — imagining that such states of affairs obtain or take place. Imagining-that in this sense may occur in two forms, sensory and nonsensory. I can imagine in vivid sensory detail that a certain state of affairs is happening, as when I imagine that a speeding car is running me down: here imaging and imagining-that overlap. But I can also imagine that something is the case in a nonsensory way, as when I imagine that Oxford University admits only students from Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean. In this instance, I am projecting and contemplating a state of affairs that has no — or, more exactly, needs no — precise sensory form: for I can imagine that Oxford admits such students without visualizing these students in the setting of the University. This is not to deny that there is a tendency to fall back on imaging whenever possible, especially when we daydream or entertain conscious fantasies. In this respect, imaging seems to aid in imagining-that by depicting how a state of affairs would appear in concretely sensuous form. But imaging is not *necessary* to the enactment of imagining-that, and it is perfectly possible to imagine-that abstractly and without the support of imagistic detail. What is important is that we do not seek to reduce all imagining to imaging on the one hand (as Hume attempts to do) or to imagining-that on the other (as Ryle tries to do).[16] Each is a separate, live option for the imaginer.

(iii) *imagining-how*. The same point applies to imagining-how. This too can occur in a sensuous or in a nonsensuous manner. I may imagine how to tie a particular sailor's knot by projecting the various steps in an explicitly visual form. But I may also imagine how to solve a problem in mathematics without in any way concretely embodying my thought process or its objects: I just "run through" the projected steps in an abstract and sensuously unspecified way. It is true that imagining-how is closely related to imagining-that insofar as the former always involves the projection and contemplation of a certain state of affairs. But the state of affairs entertained in imagining-how includes a sense of personal agency: I imagine how I or someone else does something or gets somewhere, or how it is for myself or someone else to feel or perceive something in a certain situation. In sheer imagining-that, in contrast, I merely suppose that a given situation obtains, whether or not any human agent is involved in it. I can imagine, for instance, that the surface of the sun looks like a lunar landscape without injecting any sense of human presence. But I imagine *how* it would be to live on such a solar surface by projecting myself (or someone else) onto this surface as its inhabitant.

No doubt there are still other forms which acts of conscious imagining may assume. It seems, for example, that we can imagine something *as* in a sense that is slightly different from imagining-that: I can imagine myself as gregarious without necessarily imaging myself qua gregarious, imagining that I am gregarious, or imagining how it would be to be gregarious. But the three forms of imaging, imagining-that, and imagining-how do account for the vast majority of the acts of imagining which we enact or undergo.

(b) *object-phase*. In spite of Ryle's disclaimers, when we imagine we imagine something and not nothing. By the term "object-phase" I refer to *all* that we thus imagine — the entire intentional correlate or imaginative presentation. Constituting this correlate or presentation are three basic elements: imagined content, the imaginal margin, and the image.

(i) *imagined content*. By this is meant specifically *what* we imagine — that which is identifiable or recognizable as a certain thing or kind of thing. This content is equivalent to what we would report to others if asked about what we imagine. When I say that I imagined 'a five-legged lion,' I make reference to the specific content of what I have imagined. This specific content is composed of imagined objects and/or states of affairs. Thus I can specify, sometimes by name, both the object and the situation I imagine. Take Sartre's now-classic example: I imagine my friend Peter in

16. Hume's reduction is implicit in his entire treatment of imagination in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), esp. p. 10, p. 140 and pp. 266 ff. Ryle states flatly that "imagining is always imagining that something is the case." (This statement is from Ryle's paper "Imaginary Objects," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. XII (1933), p. 43. See also *The Concept of Mind*, p. 256.)

Berlin.[17] Designated here is not only the person 'Peter', but a whole affair-complex 'Peter-in-Berlin'. 'Peter' names the partial specific content; 'Peter-in-Berlin' designates the total specific content.

But closer analysis reveals that the full imagined content includes not only particular objects and/or states of affairs but also their immediately surrounding context. We may call this contextual factor "the imagined world-frame of quasi-space and -time," since it is a matter of the experiential field within which imagined objects and states of affairs appear. These latter do not emerge in a vacuum; they must appear as located somewhere, although not in the homogeneous, objective space and time of perception. *Where* they do appear is no neatly delimited region with set boundaries and measurable internal distances. Indeed, the site for the appearance of imagined objects and states of affairs is not so much a "place" or region as it is an amorphous field which, though difficult to specify itself, serves to frame and present specifiable imagined entities and events. This is done in ambiguous and non-determinate spatial and temporal parameters which are tailored to each case. In each successive instance, these parameters form a different mini-world of experience rather than contributing to, or being continuous with, the single, universal space and time of the perceived world (a world which is finally *one* world).

(ii) *imaginal margin*. The imaginal margin is that penumbral zone which surrounds imagined content, including even the world-frame. It is not only difficult to specify, but strictly unspecifiable. In this regard, the nearest equivalent to the imaginal margin is Plato's Receptacle as it is found before the ingression of determinate sensible qualities. Like the Receptacle, the imaginal margin defies description. Yet it is felt to be an integral part of imaginative experience. This is easily confirmed by visualizing any given object or scene — say, the god Jupiter. It will be noticed that at the outer fringes of this imagined figure there is a nebulous area which cannot be said to be either strictly continuous or strictly discontinuous with the figure itself. The imaginative presentation just trails off indefinitely as it becomes progressively less distinct in identifiable content. (The same thing happens when we attempt to fill in the margin around 'Jupiter' with other figures: these latter are in turn surrounded by an undifferentiated qualitative halo.) Finally, when past a certain ill-defined point, we can no longer say what, if anything, is being presented to us. The imagined content seems to have run its course — evaporated, as it were — without, however, ceasing so abruptly as to leave us with an entirely empty abyss of nothingness. Rather, there is a sense of *something*, nor of sheer nothing, that continues to ring around the specifiable content and its world-frame. But, unlike the fringes of the perceptual field, it does not seem to surround the imaginer himself on all sides. The marginal area remains projected *in front* of him, on the lateral edges of the plane of presentation. Thus the imaginal margin contributes to the irrevocably frontal, depthless character of the imaginative presentation, which hovers before the imaginer at a certain indefinite and untrespassable remove. (This sense of remove is to be contrasted with the situation in perceiving, where we find ourselves always already enmeshed in the midst of a circumambient, three-dimensional world of palpable material things and persons.)

(ii) *the image*. I construe the term "image" not in its usual meaning — i.e., as a pictorial form of imaginative presentation — but rather as *the mode of presentation* with which imagined content is given to the imaginer's consciousness.[18] The image is not *what* is present to awareness — this is the content proper — but *how* this content is presented. Only rarely are we explicitly conscious of the image in this sense, but when we attend closely to imaginative experience we become increasingly aware of a multiplicity of modes of givenness, three of which may be mentioned here.

(1) relative *clarity*. Imagined content may be given with differing degrees and types of clarity. Contrast, for example, the comparative clarity by which the imaged face of an absent friend is given to me with the obscurity that infects a thirty-

17. Sartre, *L'Imaginaire*, pp. 13 ff.

18. In this respect, we may agree with Ryle when he says that "roughly, imaging occurs, but images are not seen" (*The Concept of Mind*, p. 247).

sided polygon which I am attempting to imagine. The imaged face springs vividly to consciousness, while the geometrical figure is present to mind — if it can be said to be present at all — only in an extremely diffuse way. Thus there is room for considerable variation in the clarity with which imagined content may be presented to us.

(2) *texture*. The texture or felt quality of imaginative presentations also varies considerably, depending on the specific imagined content. These presentations may give an impression of smoothness, as when we imagine a marble facade, or of coarseness, as in imaging a choppy sea. Although imaginal texture is thus usually determined by the nature of what is imagined, it lacks the concretely tangible character of perceived texture. We are not tempted to reach out and *touch* imagined texture as we might be when perceiving or hallucinating. For there is an unbridgeable gulf between ourselves and the surface of the imaginative presentation; and we are convinced that this surface is impalpable.

(3) *directness*. Although imagined content always presents itself in the frontal way just described, it can be given more or less directly in any particular case. Thus I might first imagine a person whose face is turned directly toward me; but I might then go on to imagine the same person with his face averted or even turned completely away from me. The same is true of the person as a whole: he can be envisaged as standing directly before my imagining gaze or as given indirectly (for example, as reflected in a mirror).

What such "images" or modes of presentation point to is the highly variable character of imaginative experience. It is this variability which, combined with the inherent instability of imaginative attention, accounts for the strikingly evanescent quality of so much imagining. Only with the most disciplined mental exertion can I hold the same imaginative presentation constantly before my imagining mind; and even then it becomes questionable whether I can continue to say that it is "the same" presentation which is being contemplated throughout. Unanchored in an underlying and persistent spatio-temporal field, essentially unexplorable (nothing can be strictly speaking discovered there, for nothing pre-exists the very act of conscious projection by which imagined content is constituted), this presentation slides from the tenterhooks of concerted attention, quickly giving way to another presentation: "one glimpse and vanished," says Beckett.[19]

B. Essential Traits. Under this second main heading, I wish to consider six of the most prominent essential traits of imagination viewed as a total phenomenon. By "essential traits" I mean traits that are essentially necessary to imagining—indispensable to it in one way or another, as could be shown in each instance by the test of free variation. It should be forewarned that such essential traits, even when taken together, do not constitute a *sufficient* list. Their mere co-presence or collocation is not by itself enough to bring about an act of imagining. Still other traits would have to be cited if sufficiency were to be claimed and a complete description offered. In the meanwhile, adequacy of description must be the aim of the present limited endeavour. Accordingly, the following traits are selected for their representativeness and suggestiveness, not for their exhaustiveness. They will be grouped into three pairs so as to facilitate the analysis: spontaneity and controlledness, self-containedness and self-evidence, indeterminacy and pure possibility.

(a) *Spontaneity and Controlledness*. This first pair of essential traits is quite crucial, and I shall dwell on it longest. It possesses what we may call "option-necessity" in contrast with the "trait-necessity" of the other two pairs. Any given case of conscious imagining will be characterized by spontaneity or controlledness—*by one or the other, but not both*. Thus these two traits are mutually exclusive—what is spontaneous cannot be simultaneously controlled and vice-versa—and yet jointly exhaustive of that dimension of imaginative experience which has to do with the relative freedom with which the imaginer's consciousness operates. That they are mutually exclusive does not mean that one of them might not characterize the act-phase, and the other the object-phase, of a particular imaginative experience: I can be controlling an act of imagining when a certain imaginative presentation appears spontaneously. It only means that both traits cannot apply to precisely the *same* phase at the same time and in the same respect.

19. Beckett, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

(i) *spontaneity*. There is a whole tradition which imputes spontaneity to imagining—extending from Kant and Schelling down to Collingwood and Sartre. But the existence of this tradition does not make it any easier to determine precisely what imaginative spontaneity consists in. Is this spontaneity simply a matter of acting without an efficient cause (as in Kant's original conception)? Is it an aspect of nihilation (as Sartre holds)? Approached phenomenologically, the spontaneity of imagination is not adequately characterized in either of these ways. Instead, the felt quality of imaginative spontaneity is to be described in such terms as "gliding," "floating," "sliding" into or before consciousness. There is something peculiarly *autonomic* about spontaneous imagining —something that is strikingly self-generating, requiring no intervention by an outside agency (not even by the imaginer himself). The imaginative act or presentation appears to arise *sui generis* and without having been willed into existence. If such self-generativity may be taken as the basic feature of spontaneous imagining, we can proceed to specify three ways in which it expresses itself.

(1) *effortlessness*. A spontaneously imagined entity or event arises without any conscious effort on the part of the imagining subject. This subject feels that he has contributed nothing of substance to the formation of the spontaneous appearance, and this is so even if he is convinced that his presence as the sole *witness* to this appearance is required. Nor does such an appearance emerge with any sense of belaboured effort on *its* part. Rather, there is a sense of free facility in the phenomenon of appearing, a lack of inhibition or restraint. Nothing constrains the spontaneous imaginative act or presentation either to appear or *not* to appear; and if it does appear, it simply arises of its own accord.

(2) *surprise*. In encountering an apparently self-generated entity or event in the perceptual world one's characteristic reaction is one of incredulity: "How did *that* happen?" One is simply astonished that such a thing as, say spontaneous combustion could take place in an apparent absence or irrelevance of pre-existing conditions. Now, all seemingly self-generated events, perceived or imagined, carry with them an essential element of surprise. But where surprise may approach stupefaction in the case of perceived self-generation (where we "can't believe our own eyes"), in the case of conscious imagining our reaction is rarely this extreme: we are *taken* by surprise, but we are not swept away by it. Our mental composure is retained because it is not a matter of anything that undermines or threatens our habitual beliefs. For in imagining, committed beliefs—and disbeliefs, as Coleridge pointed out—are suspended from the start. By the same token, our basic stock of knowledge is not altered, since we do not strictly speaking *learn* anything from imagining: that is, anything that we do not in some sense already know.[20] Nevertheless, even though spontaneous imaginative experiences represent no threat either to knowledge or to belief, they are still capable of surprising us because of the way in which their self-generated character subverts our usual expectations as to causal agency and because they fulfill intentions of which we may not have been fully aware.

(3) *instantaneity*. Genuine self-generation, that is, generation *ex nihilo*, can occur only at a single stroke, since the transition from a state of non-being to one of being without the intervention of external agencies is an absolute one which does not brook intermediate, time-taking stages. Such a transition or "leap" between two wholly disparate states can occur only instantaneously, *totum simul*: in the timeless "moment" of which Kierkegaard speaks.[21] It is just such a sense of instantaneous explosion-into-being that is experienced in spontaneous imaginative acts and presentations. These leap to our mental eyes or ears in one fell swoop: they spring into being as if from *nothing*, or at least from nothing that has been experienced immediately prior to their appearance. They can appear in this way to us only in the temporal format of the instant or moment.

20. Here we may concur with Sartre when he says that "the image teaches nothing. Comprehension is realized *in* an image but not *by* the image." (*L'Imaginaire*, p. 136.)

21. See Soren Kirkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. D. F. Swenson and H. V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), esp. "Interlude".

It may be concluded that the spontaneity which characterizes many imaginative acts and presentations is clarified when it is viewed in terms of the general feature of *self-generativity*. For all three of the distinctive aspects of imaginative spontaneity—its effortlessness, surprising character, and instantaneous quality—can be seen as facets of the fundamentally self-generative nature of this spontaneity. In possessing such a sense of self-generativity, imagination is perhaps unique among mental acts. For no other mental act, with the possible exception of thinking, is spontaneous in such a thoroughly self-incurring manner.

(ii) *controlledness*. Tempting as it may be, it would be a mistake to regard *all* imaginative activity as spontaneous in character. A not inconsiderable amount of it is controlled by the imaginer himself. The control of which he is capable complements, as well as contrasts with, the spontaneity of imagining. In fact, controlledness and spontaneity are complementary components of imagination's inherent autonomy. Spontaneity signifies that pole of imaginative experience at which acts and presentations appear in an autonomic, unexpected upsurge. Controlledness signifies the opposite pole, where the power of the imaginer over his own acts and presentations is most effectively expressed and experienced. In former accounts of imagination, controlledness has been much less discussed than spontaneity, but it remains a live option for imaginative experience—as Aristotle observed when he said that "imagining is up to us when we wish."[22]

Controlledness is exercised at three critical points in imaginative experience—i.e., its initiation, guidance, and termination.

(1) *initiation*. At any time I wish, so long as I am awake and undistracted, I can initiate almost any imaginative act or presentation which I desire. Let it be a scene in which an Abyssinian Abuna is officiating in a religious ceremony: even as I propose such a scene to myself as a possible imaginative project, it begins to unfold beneath my imaginative gaze. In this case, the initiation is comparatively easy. In other cases, my mental effort is somewhat more strenuous, as in imagining that an Abuna is taking a spacewalk. But no matter how complex or bizarre the specific subject-matter, I can, in normal circumstances of alert consciousness, initiate practically any imaginative act or presentation which I choose to initiate.

(2) *guidance*. Not only am I capable of initiating my own imaginative experiences in such autocratic fashion, I am also able to guide them afterwards in whatever direction and manner I wish. Moreover, I can guide imaginative experiences which have not been initiated by me at all—including those which arise spontaneously and those which stem from strictly non-imaginative experiences such as perception or memory. Such non-self-initiated experiences can be brought under the imaginer's control: he "imaginifies" them and directs their subsequent course in whatever way he chooses. Because of these various possibilities—and still more, including even that of allowing the experience to slip momentarily out of one's control—it is in the moment of guidance that the imaginer's powers of control are displayed in their most impressive and extensive form. Here, above all, one is tempted to regard the imaginer as sovereign in his own sphere. For he seems able to direct his imaginative acts and presentations with practically unlimited latitude. At whim, he can alter whatever he is presently imagining and move it in a different direction with respect to content, mode of presentation, time-sense, and spatial character; and he can also change at will the specific form which the act of imagining takes: from, say, sensuous imagining to non-sensuous imagining-that.

(3) *termination*. The imaginer can, finally, annihilate the very appearances which he has initiated and perhaps also guided. For he can banish any given imaginative act or presentation from his mind merely by wishing to do so. No matter what its intrinsic fascination may be, and no matter what extraneous reasons he may have for continuing to imagine, he can always call a halt to it all. This can be done in either of two ways. On the one hand, he may choose to cease imagining altogether by attempting to empty his mind of all particular conscious content (a difficult procedure which may require special training) or by allowing himself to become engrossed in a wholly different kind of activity such as doing sums in

22. Aristotle. *De Anima* 427 b 16-18.

one's head. On the other hand, a given imaginative experience can be deliberately supplanted by another, distinctly different imaginative experience: here, the initiation of the new experience *is* the termination of the old one.

The foregoing descriptions of controlledness have indicated that the imaginer's capacity of control is such that he can initiate, guide, and terminate imaginative acts and presentations at will. Implied by this finding is a still stronger claim which seems to follow directly from it: to wit, the imaginer cannot fail to imagine what, how, and when he wishes to. Insofar as this is the case, there would appear to be no effective limitations on his imaginative powers. Yet is this really so? And if so, how are we to account for the common conviction (frequently reflected in philosophical theory as well) that imagination is, on the contrary, quite constricted in its scope? Let us digress for a moment in order to sketch an answer to these important questions.

It is evident that we cannot imagine *absolutely anything* we want to, and in fact, two basic kinds of limitation upon one's imaginative capacity must be admitted. The first of these is conceptual or logical in character. There are some things which cannot be imagined because they are formed from contradictory concepts and thus are logically impossible—e.g., a square circle or a four-sided triangle. Of course, one can *attempt* to imagine such self-contradictory things and even (as in hallucinated states) come to believe that one has indeed imagined them. But, however, far or wide one's imaginative capacity is stretched in this effort, what one does succeed in imagining will not qualify as a *bona fide* instance of the self-contradictory notion. Yet this essential restriction upon imaginative powers does not testify to their weakness or failure. For nothing, whether perceived *or* imagined, can possibly exemplify a conceptually contradictory notion. And where there is no possibility of success, we cannot talk, strictly speaking, of failure.

The second kind of limitation is empirical in character: namely, the contingent limits upon the individual imaginer's particular ability to imagine. It is undeniably the case that, from one person to another, there are discernible differences in the extent to which human imaginative powers are displayed. But these differences are neither so considerable nor so irresolvable as they may seem to be at a glance. In spite of differences of detail—for example, differences in the degree to which one can visualize or audialize—the *general scope* of imaginative capacity is remarkably similar from one imaginer to the next. This means that if one cannot imagine something in one way (say, by visualizing it) one can usually succeed in imagining it in some other other way (say, by touching it in imagination). Moreover, a given individual's imagination is capable of being trained, through disciplined exercises in imagining to overcome marked deficiencies. Thus empirical limitations on a specific imaginer's ability to imagine, though important, do not serve to curtail human imaginative capacity as such.

But the admission of these two kinds of limitation may still not fully allay the common sense suspicion that our imaginative powers are inherently puny, revealing (in Sartre's phrase) an "essential poverty."[23] This suspicion is not wholly unfounded. Imagining—particularly in its humdrum, everyday embodiments—certainly does not manifest the cosmic dimensions which have been claimed for it by Bruno and Blake. What needs to be recognized is that the imaginer is for the most part able to bring forth the imaginative act or presentation which he desires or intends—at least this, but by the same token, *no more*. What is brought forth in controlled imagining is typically satisfactory, but only *just* satisfactory; it does not represent an embarrassment of riches.[24] These brief remarks—which concern one of the most vexing problems to which the phenomenon of imagination gives rise—may be summed up with a statement that incorporates the qualifications just made:

23. Sartre, *L'Imaginaire*, pp. 20-21, p. 28, p. 171.

24. Neither does spontaneous imagining; but, contrary to Sartre's claim, it is at least capable of disconcerting us. (For Sartre's claim that we cannot be surprised by what we imagine, see *L'Imaginaire*, p. 170.)

In principle the imaginer cannot fail to imagine what, how, and (for the most part) when he wishes to; but what he does succeed in imagining by virtue of his capacity for imaginative control is *just* what he intends it to be and nothing more.

(b) *Self-Containedness and Self-Evidence.* In these two traits, we have to do with a straightforward "trait-necessity," that is, with the necessity that each of these traits characterize *all* phases and aspects of a given imaginative experience and thus (as contrasted with traits exhibiting option-necessity) that *both* always hold good for the entirety of this experience. Further, instead of the two traits being complementary to each other, one is the necessary condition for the other: self-containedness is a precondition for self-evidence. But we shall see that both traits display a similar self-sufficiency.

(i) *self-containedness.* This essential trait will be discussed in terms of its appearance in the two primary intentional phases.

(1) *act-phase.* Each act of conscious imagining is self-contained insofar as it is experienced as complete and needing no supplementation by other acts. The act suffices for itself. This can be seen in two ways. First, the act sweeps out its own field of action, instead of entering a preconstituted field as in perceiving or remembering. It is not a matter of controlling what already lies within the imaginative field or of injecting new content into it (as in controlledness proper) but of determining this field's limits in terms of the imaginer's ongoing interests and concerns. Secondly, the act of imagining is self-contained by virtue of its strict discontinuity with other mental acts, both imaginative and non-imaginative. Not only is the act of imagining experienced as independent of efficient causation by other acts, it presents itself as insulated from significant continuity of any kind with preceding or concurrent acts.

(2) *object-phase.* A quite similar analysis applies here. First, imagined content always appears within a field of awareness—what we earlier called the "world-frame"—which is delimited by the very activity of the imagining self. The content does not reach or refer beyond this field in any significant way, even if its component parts have been borrowed or derived from other experiences. Secondly, the imaginative presentation is felt to be self-contained in the sense of being experienced as strictly discontinuous with other presentations (whether imaginative in character or not). Reinforcing the self-containedness of the object-phase is the frontality of imaginative appearances. For each imaginative presentation is compressed into a single frontal appearance. Thus it is confined within a severely constrictive one-dimensionality which does not allow for the formation of meaningful connections with other presentations. Such connections require that phenomena be given in more than one dimension—or at least that they contain the promise of possessing other dimensions. Without these other dimensions, there is no sense of genuine discovery —of being able to uncover hidden aspects which will link up with what we already know of other phenomena. Contained within its own frontal surface, an imaginative presentation cannot refer meaningfully to anything other than itself. Therefore, if the self-containedness of the act of imagining can be said to be *self-enclosing,* that of the imaginative presentation can be said to be *self-enclosed:* ingathered in such a way as to preclude forming significant relationships with other experiential contents.

(ii) *self-evidence.* From imagination's self-containedness we may infer something basic about the sort of evidence which is given in imaginative experience. This is precisely the strict *irrelevance* of evidence which is not indigenous to the phenomenon of imagination itself. Just insofar as an imaginative act or presentation is self-contained, no evidence from other sources can bear on a given case of imagining in any definitive way.[26] Each imaginative experience brings with it its *own* unique evidence and does not need to import evidence from alien acts. Consequently, imaginative evidence is to be judged by its own criteria. Let me mention three of these criteria:

25. It should be noted that, precisely because of its self-sufficiency, imaginative experience has *no need* for such relationships. It bodies forth a miniature plenum which, insubstantial and gossamer-like though it may seem to be, lacks nothing.

26. Thus we see that self-containedness is presupposed by self-evidence, forming a necessary condition for it: to be *self*-evident is to be given in such a self-contained way as to preclude the relevance of other kinds of evidence.

(1) *non-corrigibility*. Non-corrigibility is not to be confused with incorrigibility. Incorrigible evidence is evidence that is always and only true. Non-corrigible evidence is evidence which cannot be considered either true *or* false. If imaginative evidence is non-corrigible, then imagined content is neither falsifiable nor verifiable. For there is no standard, internal or external, in terms of which this content could be judged true or false. As opposed to a case of perceptual illusion, there is nothing with respect to which the imaginer can be said to be mistaken. In spite of Pascal's warning that "imagination is the mistress of falsehood and error,"[27] we are not tricked or misled by what we imagine in the way that we can be fooled by a fake facade. For there is *nothing other than,* nothing beyond, what is immediately experienced in imagining—the imaginative presentation is, as it were, *all* facade—and thus there is no way that we could mistake a false appearance for a true one. In other words, there is no ultimate or standard-setting experience which could serve to correct the claims implicit in imaginative experience as such. This experience is as ultimate as it can be (and as it needs to be), and sets its own standards. Thus imagining is strictly non-corrigible. Just as we cannot be proven wrong in our conviction *that* we are imagining on a given occasion, so we cannot stand corrected as to *what* we imagine on this occasion. There is, in short, an unimpeachable and unimprovable mutual compresence between the imaginative presentation, the act of imagining, and the conscious awareness of the imaginer.

(2) *apodicticity*. The apodicticity or strict indubitability of imaginative evidence follows from its non-corrigibility. For there is simply no significant way in which to doubt that an imaginative act or presentation has exactly the form it appears to have. The imaginer's acquaintance with both phases of imaginative experience is total, and is unshakably secure. As distinguished from the logically apodictic, however, it is not a question of grasping something as necessary, as *having* to be the way it is. Rather, it is a matter of being certain as to how imaginative phenomena appear once (and for whatever reasons) they *do* appear. For once they appear, they appear with indubitable evidence: hence as *self*-evident in a complete and unmediated manner which precludes the possibility of doubt.

(3) *all-at-onceness*. In perception, evidence is only more or less adequate. There is always the possibility that evidence which is presently held to be certain will be disconfirmed in the future. As a consequence, there is a need to *accumulate* as much perceptual evidence as possible in order to remain certain or to gain an even greater certainty. For such evidence becomes more adequate as more of it is amassed, as can be seen in the case of archeological excavations. In imagining, by contrast, there is no comparable process of collecting increasingly adequate evidence. Indeed, there is no process of collecting evidence in the first place. Imaginative evidence is acquired all at once and once for all. This all-or-nothing character suits the fleeting character of imaginative experience, which tends to occur in a flash and which thus does not allow for the gradual accumulation of evidence of any kind.

Self-contained and self-evident, then, the experience of conscious imagining is in both respects a *self-sufficient* experience, an experience that takes place exclusively at the interface between the imaginer and his own imaginative activity. This experience is self-sufficient not only in the sense that it does not depend upon contributions from other types of experience, but also in the sense that it occurs solely within the field formed by the imaginer's own activity. This activity suffices for itself, being contained within its own self-prescribed limits and showing itself with pellucid self-evidence. As self-contained and self-evident, the act of conscious imagining is fully acquainted with itself at every moment of its duration. As such, it is an experience of supremely self-sufficient self-presence.

(c) *Indeterminacy and Pure Possibility*. Each of these last two essential features of imagining exhibits a straightforward trait-necessity. As contrasted with the trait-necessity of the previous pair of traits, however, in this instance the necessity does not qualify the phenomenon of imagination in both of its phases. The act-phase of imagining is neither indeterminate (in its occurrence it is as

27. Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. L. Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1962), p. 54.

determinate as any other mental act) nor purely possible (*qua* act it is always already actual). But the entire object-phase of imagining is both indeterminate in character and purely possible in thetic status. We should also observe that the relationship between these two traits is different from that between the respective members of the foregoing pairs of traits. In the present case, the relation is not one of complementarity or one in which one term serves as the necessary condition of the other. Rather, the two terms in question are *mutually facilitating*. The appearance of either one enhances the likelihood of the other's appearance. Something that is indeterminate is more likely to be purely possible than it is to be actual; and something that is purely possible is more likely to be indeterminate than determinate.

(i) *indeterminacy*. Although only rarely singled out in previous psychological or philosophical treatments, indeterminacy is one of the most characteristic features of imagination. For what we imagine is inherently and unavoidably indeterminate in character. It is indefinite in a sense which does not allow for any considerable increase in definiteness, much less for the achievement of constant or perfect definiteness. Yet this is not to claim that what we imagine is *entirely* indeterminate: if this were the case, we could not be said to imagine certain things rather than others on a given occasion. Thus an imaginative presentation must possess a certain minimal definiteness.

This definiteness is found above all in the imagined content. Imagined objects and states of affairs are sufficiently distinct for us to be able to recognize, to interrelate, and even on occasion to name them. It is they which fulfill specific imaginative intentions and on which our conscious attention is explicitly focused. But this does not mean that they possess a determinateness comparable to that characterizing perceptual objects. In their fluctuating and fluid state, they lack the resistant character of the latter.[28] In particular, they lack determinate positions in a measurable space and time. More than anything else, it is the vague and shifting world-frame of imagined space and time which is reasonable for the indeterminacy which infects even relatively definite imagined content.

But the image or mode of presentation is also fundamentally indeterminate. For example, the highest degree of clarity with which imagined content can be given never equals the limpid determinateness with which perceived objects and events are capable of presenting themselves. Nor is imagined texture ever as distinctly apprehended as perceived texture, or the directness of the imaginative presentation *as* direct as the directness with which what we perceive is given. Still, a certain amount of definiteness remains present in all of these cases. It is only the imaginal margin that is radically indeterminate—so indeterminate that, as we have seen, it cannot be given any definite description at all. It is the only part of the imaginative presentation that is utterly inchoate and that refuses any and all attempts at determination. In short, the imaginal margin is the indeterminate *par excellence* in imaginative experience. Nothing equivalent to this extreme degree of indeterminacy is found in perception. Although a given perceptual experience may be quite indistinct on occasion—as on a foggy evening—this indistinctness can usually be removed or obviated by means of appropriate actions on the part of the perceiver. But no such elimination of the nebulousness of the imaginal margin is possible. The indeterminacy of this margin is present as a permanent and unremovable feature of imaginative experience, giving to this experience its peculiarly beclouded aura.

(ii) *pure possibility*. This is the thetic character which is posited in the imaginative presentation, particularly in its objects and states of affairs. Corresponding to it is the belief-attitude of entertainment or sheer supposal. For we entertain imagined content as purely possible—as something that *might be* in an unattenuated sense which involves no dependence upon, or reference to, the empirically real. Hence the term "*pure* possibility," that is, possibility that is free from reference or allusion to what is externally, intersubjectively

28. Peirce would say that they lack "Secondness." In Peirce's phaneroscopic analysis — which he sometimes called "phenomenology" — imaginative phenomena would be examples of sheer Firstness, that is, of undiluted qualitative immediacy. See *Collected Papers*, eds. P. Weiss and C. Hartshorne (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-35), esp. 1.25, 1.527 ff., 2.119, 3.63, 3.422-23, 5.66, and 5.194.

the case on any given occasion. Pure possibility differs from hypothetical possibility in that the latter is posited as a means to a pre-existent end. Something which is posited as hypothetically possible is regarded *as if* it obtained for the sake of the particular situation at hand (as occurs, for instance, in pretending and in much everyday hypothesizing). A pure possibility, in contrast, plays no such mediatory, as-if role. When an imagined object or state of affairs is posited as purely possible, it is invested with an inherent, and not merely with an instrumental, interest or value. The object or state of affairs is envisaged as possible *for its own sake* — not for the sake of anything external to, or more final than, itself.

As purely possible, what we imagine merits our brief allegiance—our momentary glance—and yet is not accorded the existentially committed belief which is granted as a matter of course to perceptual objects or events (and even to the contents of hallucination). In fact, we do not strictly speaking *believe in* a given imaginative presentation: we just posit it as purely possible. Thus I do not believe that the hippogriff which I consciously imagine exists — not even in some sublimated form peculiar to imaginative experience—but only suppose that it *might be*. It is felt to be sheerly supposable, and I regard is as a purely possible denizen of my presently projected mini-world of imagination. No stronger existential claim is made or implied. Nor am I concerned with how such a beast relates to the rest of my experience or to the experiences of others. I am, in fact, merely entertaining or amusing myself by what I conjure by and for myself alone: I am entering a musing state of mind in which everything is experienced as a pure possibility. In sum, *imagining is entertaining oneself with what is purely possible.*

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The descriptions of essential traits which have just been given in section B all points to the autonomy of conscious imagining. In closing, I wish to underline this autonomy, which must be established if we are not ourselves to fall prey to the two primary pitfalls of former theories — namely, confusion of imagination with other mental acts and a denial of its importance as an act in its own right. We have found that each of the first two pairs of essential traits exhibits a distinctive aspect of this autonomy. The autonomy manifested in imaginative spontaneity consists in the self-generativity of the imaginative act or presentation, which seems to bring *itself* forth rather than being caused to appear by some external agency. Controlledness, contrariwise, embodies the autonomy of the imaginer himself as he initiates, guides, and terminates the course of his own imagining. The self-containedness of imagination indicates that imagining is a self-insulating mental act which is basically discontinuous with other acts and is thus, in its essential solitude, free to follow its own devices. Imagination's self-evident character shows that imagining reveals itself without remainder and is valid for itself alone, involving its own evidential criteria. Together, self-containedness and self-evidence underscore imagination's autonomy as a self-sufficient, independently occurring mental act.

The last pair of traits to have been considered above forms no exception to this emerging pattern of self-motivating activity. The indeterminacy of the imaginative presentation reinforces its autonomy by allowing it to elude the confining determinateness of perceptual presentations: to be indeterminate in this manner is to be open to an endless elaboration in which no imaginable options are ruled out in advance. Everything becomes possible—or more exactly, purely possible—in the realm of conscious imagining.[29] To be posited as purely possible is to be in a position to escape entangling alliances with both the actual and the necessary. It is to be liberated, however briefly, from the harsh constraints of perception, history, and inferential thinking: to be set free from *Ananke* in the largest sense.

Imagination's intentional structure as described

29. Here I would amend John Lilly's claim that "in the province of the mind, there are no limits" (*The Centre of the Cyclone* [London: Paladin, 1973], p. 19). Rather, we should say that in the province of conscious imagination, the limits that matter — i.e., those that are not merely logical or empirical — are those which the imaginer imposes on himself.

earlier in section A further bears out the autonomy of this extraordinary mental act. With regard to the act-phase, the fact that we are able to range freely from imaging to imagining-that (of either a sensory or a nonsensory sort) and to imagining-how testifies to the self-directing character of conscious imagining, as does our capacity to imagine (strictly, to "image") in the sensory modality of our own choosing. Consequently, freedom of manoeuvre is everywhere present in the act-phase of imagining. In the object-phase, we confront aspects of imagination which are no less self-determining. Imagined content presents itself in terms of its own objects and/or states of affairs and within its own self-delimiting world-frame. Around this content and world-frame is found the imaginal margin, which in its obdurate indeterminacy resists outside manipulation and alteration: its very opaqueness to analysis serves to stress imagination's autonomy. And the image or mode of presentation, in its inherent variability, further contributes to the sense of open self-regulation which pervades the experience of conscious imagining in its entirety. Thus in both of its intentional phases imagination proves itself to be an actively self-legislative act.

It may be concluded that all six essential traits, taken together with imagination's bipolar intentional structure, demonstrate the unabashedly autonomous quality of imagining as it is consciously enacted and experienced. They suggest that such imagining is not only eidetically distinct from other kinds of mental acts—and hence not to be considered a mere mode or modification of some supposedly more basic mental activity—but is also a self-regulating act in its own right, with its own type of insight and thus with an intrinsic significance and value. In any event, it is toward a fuller recognition of the autonomous character of conscious imagining that the phenomenological descriptions outlined in this paper are meant to contribute. This recognition is needed in order to secure for imagination, so long the pariah of the philosophy of mind, a place of its own on the map of essential mental powers.[30]

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30. The above paper was presented on April 6, 1973, to the annual conference of the British Society for Phenomenology at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford. It contains sections which are to be expanded in a larger work in progress.